

THE POLICY COMMITTEE ROLE IN BUDGET MATTERS

A Summary of Joint Rule 314

Prepared by the Office of Policy & Legal Analysis, Maine State Legislature
November 2012

Joint Rule 314 defines certain roles for policy committees¹ to play in conjunction with the Joint Standing Committee Appropriations and Financial Affairs Committee (“Appropriations Committee”) in budget matters. These are:

1. Advising the Appropriations Committee on those portions of the State budget bill that affect subject matter within the jurisdiction of the policy committee; and
2. Advising the Appropriations Committee on the policy committee’s priorities for bills having a fiscal impact that were favorably reported out of the policy committee.

ADVISING ON THE BUDGET BILL

After the Governor submits a budget proposal (budget bill) to the Legislature, the Appropriations Committee schedules a series of joint public hearings with policy committees on the budget bill according to the subject matter jurisdiction of each committee. Each policy committee or a subcommittee of the policy committee (unless the policy committee elects not to participate²) sits with the Appropriations Committee at the hearing on the relevant portions of the budget bill. Generally, the policy committee sits at tables in front of the Appropriations committee and the Appropriations Committee chair presides. Joint hearings allow both committees to hear the same information and to ask questions of presenters about the proposed budget.

After the joint public hearing, policy committees generally hold their own work sessions to consider the portion of the budget bill relevant to their subject area. The chairs of the Appropriations Committee, after consultation with the chairs of the policy committees, establish a schedule for the policy committees to report their recommendations on the budget bill to the Appropriations Committee. The recommendations must be made within the budgetary constraints set by the Appropriations Committee. However, the policy committee is also permitted to recommend additional funds for program priorities that exceed the original budgetary constraints, provided the committee explains its rationale for such recommendations. Policy committee recommendations are advisory and are not binding on the Appropriations Committee.

Each policy committee is required to appoint a budget subcommittee to serve as liaison to the Appropriations Committee. Subcommittees consist of between 3 and 5 committee members. Joint Rule 314 sets forth guidance on how the members are appointed and requires that the policy committee report the membership to the Appropriations Committee. The Appropriations Committee must notify the policy committee chairs and the subcommittee chair when the Appropriations Committee will be considering parts of the budget relevant to that policy committee; the budget subcommittee may participate in any such deliberations of Appropriations Committee.

¹ Under Joint Rule 314, “policy committee” means a joint standing or joint select committee other than the Appropriations Committee.

² Under Joint Rule 314, a committee can elect not to participate by notifying the chairs of the Appropriations Committee in writing.

PRIORITIZING BILLS WITH FISCAL IMPACT

Bills reported out of committee that have received initial approval in both Houses and that have a fiscal impact are tabled before final enactment on the Senate's Appropriations Table. At the end of session, the Appropriations Committee reviews these bills and makes recommendations to the full Legislature on their final passage. Each policy committee is required to advise the Appropriations Committee on the policy committee's priorities among bills reported out by the committee that are on or likely to go to the Appropriations Table.

Under Joint Rule 314 each policy committee is required to report its priorities to the Appropriations Committee within 5 days after receiving a list from the Office of Fiscal and Program Review of all bills reported out of the committee that involve appropriations or revenues. A policy committee's priorities help the Appropriations Committee determine which bills to recommend funding in the final budgeting process. The policy committee's list of its priorities must be accompanied by a form signed by all committee members indicating how they voted on the priority recommendations.

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